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Carmen A. Miró

THE INFLUENCE OF POPULATION CHANGES  
IN LATIN AMERICA

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### 1. The population "problem"

Latin America is a relatively unpopulated continent in fact, large parts of its territory which are habitable have presently few inhabitants or none. The average density for the region in 1966 was barely 12 persons per square kilometre, or approximately half the world average, a fifth that of Asia and a seventh that of Europe. Only two Latin American countries (El Salvador and Haiti), as small in population as they are in area, have densities comparable to those of Central Europe and more than ten times greater than the average given for Latin America. On the other hand, eight countries making up sixty per cent of the population of Latin America have densities equal to or below the region's average. When one considers that this is an average of data for densely populated areas such as the large cities taken together with highly dispersed towns and villages, one must conclude that Latin America has in fact large areas potentially habitable.

This leads us to ask why, if the relation of population to land is not a cause for concern, is the population of Latin America so often mentioned in association with the word "problem"? Essentially because two phenomena are occurring simultaneously which, without showing a clear cause and effect relation, suggest the existence of a reciprocal effect -- a high demographic growth-rate accompanied by social and economic underdevelopment.

While the first is speeding up, the second is becoming more acute. While there may not be sufficient evidence to say that the first gives rise to the second or vice-versa, what is important is that their behavior seems to be associated. This was recognized by the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLA) in a study of economic underdevelopment of the region since the Second World War, when in showing how the rate of development fell towards the end of the 1950's it stated that "at the same time as economic growth slowed, there was an increase in population growth such

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\* The views expressed here are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect those of the United Nations.

that the per capita product for Latin America as a whole rose in recent years at an annual rate of only 1.4 per cent, the growth of real income being still less".<sup>1/</sup>

Further on in the same report, new reference was made to the connexion between demographic behaviour and economic growth as follows:

"Increase in population growth and the labour force are other factors characterizing post-war economic growth. This demographic phenomenon raises two basic problems: (a) the economy's capacity to absorb the work force at adequate production levels, and (b) the per capita income level and its eventual distribution among the different social sectors."<sup>2/</sup>

Naturally, the "problem" is one of population for those who think that it is accelerated demographic growth which hinders the achievement of sustained economic growth, and one of development for those who think that because economic growth is insufficient it cannot properly take care of the growing number of inhabitants. For the former solution is demographic, for the latter, economic. Perhaps in this dilemma there is no single answer, but it seems likely that in either situation it would be necessary to work with both variables. This paper summarizes the behaviour shown in Latin America in recent years by the demographic variable, together with some of the associated economic tendencies. Short-term perspectives of demographic evolution will also be considered. Finally, certain recent events will be described which suggest that some Latin American governments are complementing economic solutions to the problem of development with demographic solutions. Concentration here on the latter does not imply that the economic picture matters less, but merely that the author prefers to consider the demographic aspect.

## 2. The demographic situation in Latin America

### a) The elements affecting change

The demographic evolution of Latin America in recent years has been described by various authors,<sup>3/</sup> and is well enough known that it need not

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1/ CEPAL. E/CN.12/659/Rev.1. El desarrollo económico de América Latina en la postguerra. Nov., 1963, page 1.

2/ Ibid., page 3.

3/ See for example: Davis, Kingsley. "Posición de América Latina en la historia demográfica mundial" in Demografía y salud pública en América Latina, translation of the Milbank Memorial Foundation Quarterly Publication Vol. XLII, No. 2 April 1964, part 2.

be discussed here in detail. Its main features are as follows:

i) Fertility: High, almost stabilized. For the whole region the gross birth rate for about the year 1955 was more than 40 per thousand per year, in some cases reaching fifty per thousand. The areas of greatest fertility are in Continental Central America and Tropical South America, where it is possible that small increases in fertility have resulted from a fall in the death rate <sup>4/</sup>. Only two countries Argentina and Uruguay show birth rates below 24 per thousand, similar to those in the world's more developed regions. In another two countries (Cuba and Chile) the rate is about 35 per thousand. There are, of course, large differences in fertility - rates in rural areas being often twice as high as urban. An undeniable correlation between fertility and the degree of education of women has also been shown. In some Latin American cities the fertility of uneducated women is three times that of those with university education. Similar differences, although of different magnitude, are found between women in rural areas with different levels of education <sup>5/</sup>.

ii) Mortality: Moderately low. The fall in mortality must have begun at the end of the 1930's when the gross annual mortality rate was estimated at 25 per thousand for most of the countries in the region. The drop seems to have gained impetus after 1945 when the rate fell in almost all countries to around 15 per thousand. In certain countries (Bolivia and Haiti), relatively high mortality rates continue, similar to those in the advanced countries at the turn of the century. Even in cases such as Argentina, where life expectancy at birth is about 66 years, the index is still significantly below that found in the developed regions of the world. The latest estimates for the United States, for example, set this figure at more than 70 years.

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<sup>4/</sup> For explanation of this see: CELADE, Lerda, Juan Carlos, "Efecto de un descenso de la mortalidad en la fecundidad".

<sup>5/</sup> Urban-rural and educational differentials have been examined in the following CELADE documents: Carlton, Robert O., "Tendencias y diferencias de la fecundidad en la América Latina"; Cerisola, María Elsa, "Fecundidad diferencial en la República de Paraguay según condición de ruralidad y nivel de instrucción de la mujer"; Lattes, Alfredo, "La fecundidad efectiva en la República Argentina según algunas características demográficas de la madre"; Miró, Carmen A., "Un programa de encuestas comparativas de fecundidad en la América Latina: Refutación de algunos conceptos erróneos"; Pacheco, Gustavo, "Algunos diferenciales de fecundidad en Chile medidos a través de la información censal de 1960".

The average figures given by national mortality rates hide important differences between different areas in the same country. Unfortunately, studies are insufficient to make this phenomenon clear. Isolated cases however, serve to illustrate the great disparities which can be inferred to exist between health levels in different areas of a country when their life expectancies at birth ( $e_0^o$ ) are compared:

( $e_0^o$ ) about 1960 <sup>a/</sup>

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<u>Argentina</u>	
Total	66
Pampas Region	67
Córdoba	60
<u>Chile</u>	
Total	57
Magallanes	63
Nuble, Concepción, Bío-Bío,	
Malleco	53

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a/ estimates by CELADE

Infant mortality, which like that of other age groups in the population had been falling in Latin America, seems to have slowed its rate of decline in recent years. This phenomenon is taking place at a time when the infant mortality rate for the region fluctuates at values between four and seven times greater than those of Sweden, and is one of the highest in the world. This leveling-off in the infant mortality rate, in fact, continually increases the difference between the developed countries and Latin America and seems to be mainly the result of socio-economic factors since, states Behm <sup>6/</sup> "illness and death of the child in its first year of life is closely linked with the living-conditions of the family into which it is born".

iii) Immigration: Neglecting migration between Latin American countries which sometimes can influence the growth of their populations, the region as a whole does not receive significant immigration from other parts of the world. Generally speaking, given the high domestic increase, immigration from abroad has in the past contributed little.

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<sup>6/</sup> Behm Rosas, Hugo. "Mortalidad infantil y nivel de vida." Ediciones de la Universidad de Chile, Santiago, 1962.

Internal migration, on the other hand, has strongly affected the population distribution, having contributed greatly to the high and growing concentration of the Latin American population in cities, a recent phenomenon in most of these countries.

In 1960 more than 31 million people, about 15 per cent of the total population, lived in 20 cities of more than half a million inhabitants, whereas in 1940, there were only eight cities of this size, containing 12 million people.

b) Other characteristics

It is the variation of the elements described which determines the other characteristics of the present demographic situation of Latin America. Those most obviously associated with economic and social development will now be considered.

i) The rate of growth: A high and increasing rate of total population growth -estimated at about 2.8 per cent per year for 1960. The increase in growth is obvious when this rate is compared with that of former decades.

<u>Decade</u>	<u>Annual rate %</u>
1920-30	1.8
1930-40	1.9
1940-50	2.2
1950-60	2.7

At the national level, the growth rate depends on fertility and mortality, it varies between 1.7 per cent for Argentina and Uruguay, to about 4 per cent for Costa Rica and Venezuela.

Internal migration, which consists mainly in the movement of people from country areas to the cities, also produces differential rates of urban and rural growth. In most countries of the region, the latter rate was at least two per cent annually between the two most recent censuses. On the other hand, except for Argentina (and probably Uruguay) where urbanization has already reached quite a high level, the urban population grew in almost every country at more than five per cent a year, in one case (Venezuela) more than 8 per cent.

ii) The Age Structure: Falling mortality combined with stable fertility gives rise to a population in which the resulting predominance of children and adolescents increases further the tendency towards rejuvenation -excepting Argentina, Uruguay, Cuba and Chile, 53 per cent of the population was under twenty, according to the most recent census.

Since domestic migration is selective in regard to age, the migrants being mainly young adults, the proportion of those below twenty years of age is still generally greater in the rural areas of Latin America. The following examples illustrates this:

	<u>Urban</u>	<u>Rural</u>
Costa Rica, 1963	52.5	59.9
Panamá, 1960	48.8	56.7
Chile, 1960	47.6	53.5

### 3. Influence of demographic changes

Nobody questions the fact that Latin America is in a stage of economic and social underdevelopment. ECLA has characterized <sup>7/</sup> some of the conditions as: a) low average per capita income, estimated in 1961 at 420 dollars, or two fifths of the West European countries, a sixth of the United States and Canada, and a half of the East European countries. This is less than the world average which is about 600 dollars; b) an extremely unequal distribution of income with the sectors where this is more acute remaining important in the region; c) agricultural production unequal to effective demand; d) production of non-agricultural goods also unable to absorb available manpower; e) stagnant productivity in trade, finance, government and other services; f) a precarious food situation in which mortality due to malnutrition is high; g) housing shortage with a predominance of improvised dwellings lacking hygienic services and excessively crowded; h) a low educational level with a continuing high percentage of illiteracy. In some countries more than fifty per cent of persons above fifteen years have no education, and i) inadequate medical and hospital facilities.

Associated as they are, underdevelopment and the high demographic growth rate must influence one another mutually. The most obvious influences are:

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<sup>7/</sup> CEPAL, op. cit.

a) The investment rate. The first such influence arises from the rate of investment needed to meet the requirements a growing population. To quote ECLA "the economic and social consequences common to most Latin American countries are evident. If we assume that the product-capital ratio is 0.40, Latin America as a whole would require a net annual investment of 7.5 per cent of the gross product to grow at a rate of 3 per cent a year, which would only succeed in maintaining unchanged the per capita income level. To reach a per capita growth of 3 per cent, which is considered a minimum goal although higher than that set in the Charter of Punta del Este (2.5 per cent), net investment would need to rise at 15 per cent, which would require extraordinary effort compared to the present bare 10 per cent" <sup>8/</sup>

To this must be added that the growing proportion of persons below 20 years, which makes real productive investment resources continually less for the maintenance of the investment rate suggested.

b) Absorption of potential manpower in productive labour. The inability of non-agricultural production to absorb the continued increase in the labour force has been described under conditions of underdevelopment. The main reason is an urban population increasing often at more than 5 per cent annually. This has given rise to a characteristic Latin American phenomenon: the movement of large sections of the economically active population into services and other activities of very low productivity. The same ECLA STUDY describes the picture as follows: Rates of economic growth of 4 or 5 per cent in countries whose population is increasing at 3 per cent are clearly insufficient to absorb the labour force." <sup>9/</sup>

c) Unorganized urbanization. The massive movement of people from rural areas and small towns to large cities, combined with insufficient economic and social development, has brought with it an urbanization characterized by every kind of lack: employment, housing, education, health, transportation and other public services, recreation and even social integration.

#### 4. Prospects

The possibility of Latin America achieving sustained economic development depends on the combination of a number of factors, among which it is worth mentioning the taking of effective measures to eliminate unequal

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<sup>8/</sup> CEPAL, op. cit., pages 81 and 82.

<sup>9/</sup> CEPAL, op. cit., page 32

distribution in the ownership of capital and natural resources, and no less important, of measures leading to a reduction in population growth.

The demographic forecasts made by the United Nations for Latin America are well known. The population of the region, which in the year 1966 was estimated at 244 millions, is expected to reach in 14 years (by 1980) more than 363 millions, that is to say an increase of 50 per cent in this short time. Should the mortality and fertility trends described in section 2 above, continue to the end of the century, the population would exceed 740 million. This projection however, is not considered very likely, and a more probable figure would be about 612 million. Naturally growth would be different in each country, the largest increase being in continental Central America and tropical South America.

Even in the case of an effective and continuous fall in fertility, the proportion of young people will still continue for some years to be a high proportion of the total population.

In 1966, the number of persons annually entering economic activity was estimated as 3.3 million <sup>10/</sup>, which figure will have risen by 1980 to more than 5 million annually, the economically active population by then having risen to almost double that of 1960. Indications are that urbanization will continue at the present high rate. The United Nations has estimated <sup>11/</sup> that by 1980 Latin America will have about 100 million people living in cities of half a million or more.

##### 5. Action to meet the population "problem"

In the face of the prospects that have been described, a concern for the influence of demographic changes on the possibilities of development has brought many responsible groups in Latin America to face the population "problem" more rationally. Available demographic data are being studied with the intention of including the population factor as a variable in economic and social planning. The number of personnel qualified in demographic analysis is being increased and the study of demography has been introduced into the universities. Two regional centers are encouraging these activities, the Latin American Demographic Center (Centro Latinoamericano de Demografía -CELADE), its

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<sup>10/</sup> "Aspectos demográficos de la población económicamente activa (PEA) en América Latina". Unpublished report prepared by CEPAL with the co-operation of CELADE.

<sup>11/</sup> United Nations Urbanization Seminar. World Urbanization Trends, 1920-1960.

branch in Central America, and one national branch (The Colegio de México). Three countries, Chile, Costa Rica and Honduras, have incorporated family planning assistance in their health services. The Colombian Ministry of Health in cooperation with the Colombian Association of Medical Faculties has begun a broad programme for training doctors, nurses and other health workers in family planning methods. Various countries including Mexico, having incorporated family planning assistance into their social security services. In practically all Latin American countries, activities are under way to encourage the use of family planning methods, whether through private groups or state institutions. In many of the countries experimental programmes are going forward with the help of state universities. Generally speaking there is a more favourable climate in the different spheres for consideration of the population "problem" -proof of which is that for the first time, an international conference of the International Planned Parenthood Federation is being held in a Latin American country, with official sponsorship and with the full participation of Latin American professionals. There is no doubt that all these activities find effective support in large sections of public opinion in Latin America, especially among women. The Latin American Demographic Center interviewed, with the help of various national institutions, a sample of some 16 thousand women in 7 cities of the region <sup>12/</sup>. The attitude of these women towards family planning was generally favourable. Among married women a high proportion (from 38 per cent in Mexico City to 78 in Buenos Aires) stated that they had at some time used contraceptives, and this was found to correlate with the level of education.

It is noteworthy that up to the present, the measures adopted have been based on the need to protect the family, avoid abortion, and in general secure a fuller life for children and parents. This means that the problem is focused at the microsocial level, that of the family. Up till now there have been in Latin America no programmes which seek essentially demographic objectives in association with economic and social development plans. There is no country in the region which has adopted a demographic policy as this was defined by a recent weekly "A coherent set of decisions following a rational strategy adopted by the public sector in accordance with the needs and wishes of families

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<sup>12/</sup> United Nations, E/CN.9/AC.6/R.24, October 1966. "The programme of comparative fertility surveys being conducted by the Latin American Demographic Centre", Ad Hoc Committee of Experts on Programmes in Fertility.

and of society, with the purpose of directly influencing the probable size of the population, its composition by age, the size of the family, and the regional or rural-urban distribution, in order to achieve development objectives. Such a policy will have to consider and evaluate the influences of social processes -especially education, housing, health and employment, on these objectives". <sup>13/</sup>

If as has been repeatedly pointed out in this paper, there is a clear association between the demographic situation in Latin America and its under developed condition, it would seem unwise to further postpone the integration into the general context of economic and social planning, of a demographic policy such as has been described.

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<sup>13/</sup> OEA : "Bases de acuerdo del seminario preparatorio". Meeting on Population Policies in relation to Development in Latin America. Preparatory Seminar, Feb., 1967.

